

Testimony In Support of HB 4891

House Appropriations Committee

July 16, 2014

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, the Michigan Association of Drug Court Professionals wishes to express it's support for HB 4891 which provides for a gradual phase in of a portion of the net alcohol tax to be used to support drug and alcohol treatment.

Over the past few years, the legislature has been very supportive of efforts to expand the network of Problem Solving Courts in our state. Drug Courts, Sobriety Courts, Mental Health Courts and others have proven to be successful in address the underlying drug and alcohol addictions of criminal defendants, reducing recidivism and saving monies in the form of lower jail and prison expense.

Recently a study of Michigan's Sobriety Court Ignition Interlock Program showed that over three years, repeat drunk driving participants in this program had a Drunk Driving recidivism rate of only 1.7%, far less than repeat drunk drivers on standard probation. They also had a probation successful completion rate of 90%. Last year we were able to expand this program into 17 rural counties by establishing Regional Sobriety Courts. This allows rural jurisdictions to share court resources to help create and sustain these programs. In 2015 we are hoping to use the same approach by setting up Urban Regional Sobriety Courts in Kent, Saginaw and Wayne Counties.

It has been the goal of the Administration, the Legislature and the MADCP to expand the reach of Sobriety Courts as well as the other Problem Solving Courts across the state. However, to accomplish this goal we need an effective treatment delivery system that provides prompt access to appropriate substance abuse services. Sadly, this is not always the case.

Last week, in my own felony sobriety court, I had to remove an indigent participant from the program and place her in jail because we could not secure the services that were required to address her issues. We knew what was needed, but there was no money to pay for those services. Keeping her in the program when we could not provide her the treatment needed to keep her sober, would have simply been setting her up for failure. With multiple drunk driving convictions on her record, there is little doubt that she will be back. This is not just a onetime event. Every Problem solving court judge in the state has similar stories.

Passage of HB 4891 will go a long way towards addressing these kinds of issues by providing a dedicated, reasonable and predicable funding stream for substance abuse disorder services. Furthermore, there would seem to be a certain simple logic to using a portion of the net alcohol tax to improve our state's substance abuse treatment network.

July 10, 2014

Rep. Joseph Haveman, Chairperson
House Appropriations Committee
State Capitol
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Re. HB 4891

Dear Rep. Haveman:

I am writing to express our strong support of the Michigan Association of Drug Court Professionals (MADCP) for HB 4891, which will dedicate a portion of the state's annual income from alcohol taxes and fees for substance use disorder treatment and prevention.

Judges and other professional members in MADCP recognize how critical the need is in Michigan for adequately funded treatment and prevention services. The legislature, wisely in our judgment, has provided increased funds for specialty courts to direct people with substance use and mental health disorders out of the jails and into care. Additional drug/sobriety courts and mental health courts are being developed all across Michigan. The legislative Mental Health Commission in its recommendations strongly supports this effort to redirect people in need to appropriate care rather than jail or prison. The legislative Diversion Council is considering additional strategies to ensure that people who do not really belong in jail are diverted to the services that can effectively address their conditions, something jails and prisons never were intended to do. Because of the proven effectiveness of specialty courts over the years, these diversion efforts can contribute to healthier and safer local communities and to significant cost savings for the state.

The great promise of all these legislative strategies assumes that an effective treatment delivery system remains in place and that prompt access to services is readily available. Certainly such quick access is key to the success of our specialty courts. But access upon demand is not always the case in many parts of our state; waiting lists are increasing. Many of the newest treatment modalities, especially medication assisted treatment, are not well used due to limited funding. The courts are increasingly aware of effective treatment methods. Often those newer treatment services are not readily available primarily due to inadequate funds. It appears to us that the substance use disorder safety net is more and more frayed. The state simply cannot reduce funds for such services as it has done over the past twenty years and still expect to address this major public health problem and public safety problem.

HB 4891, by creating a dedicated, reasonable and predictable funding stream for substance abuse disorder services, goes a long way toward ensuring the success of the legislative initiatives I mentioned. It means that not only will we have ready access to services, but that new treatment methods that are demonstrated to help maintain long term recovery are more widely used. There are few other things this legislature can do that will help so much to ensure healthy individuals, families and local communities and provide for safer communities.

We urge this committee unanimously to approve HB 4891 and recommend it to the full House. Thank you for the opportunity to express our support.

Sincerely,



President
Michigan Association of Drug Court Professionals

cc: John Hohman, SCAO
bc: John Andrews